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ABSTRACT

Social science concepts have an impact on the study of teacher education in developing countries, and teacher education is a primary social force woven throughout the study of national development. A recommended approach to research on teacher education combines a study of how education influences, and in turn is influenced by, other developmental forces and events within a national, regional, or other unifying network, such as religion or tribal identity. Economic, social, and political realities are major factors governing an understanding of how teacher education relates to national progress. Economic factors are also involved in a high imbalance between numbers of students and scarcity of financial resources for education. In the realm of politics, educational programs are vulnerable to national political decisions and the kinds of schools the government demands. Social class values and attitudes and social differences among the educated and the illiterate are factors which determine inequalities in schooling. Studying teacher education concerns in developing nations demands a set of strategies from the combined social sciences and a balance in methodology from each. (JD)

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Methodological Issues
in Researching
Teacher Education in Developing Countries

A speech presented to
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by

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Teacher education is a part of what western researchers refer to as a social science. Yet researching teacher education in any developing country cannot fit so neatly into a single discipline because it is impossible to regard the education and training of teachers as a single methodological variable. In fact, no simple perspective can lead to a complete understanding of how training programs of any kind can predict patterns of national development.

Just as we can no longer ignore the international effects of trade and commerce on national productivity and economic health, so we can no longer ignore the dramatic changes in the production and maintenance of teachers in the less industrialized world. My argument here, however, is not just for teacher educators to understand the problems associated with educating teachers in poorer nations, but also for a new strategy for even analyzing what those particular problems are.

The way in which we research teacher education in industrialized countries must give way to studying those conditions that actually exist in less industrialized nations. Even in the developed world, teacher education has had its hypotheses and methodology challenged by international experiences. We have learned, for example, to treat with suspicion models which predicted numbers of teachers by a given year, or amount of literacy, or pupil-teacher ratios, especially if these were based on population statistics. There simply is no linear progression of development in teacher education or any other social discipline. And conditions have disproven emphatically any clear relationship between economic development and kind of national government or political stability.

Social scientists in the Third World are increasingly writing books on entire countries, and not just development sectors like education. These include studies on Burma, Nigeria, Ghana and Mexico. This is a definite change from conceiving how teacher education, for example, reflects what the state determines should be education policy, to how the country itself functions.

Moreover, the international debate about changes in investments away from physical capital (such as savings) to formal education are a part of the broader policy shifts that affect teacher education. There are others such as whether a nation should emphasize mass literacy or functional school literacy; literacy or skill training; agriculture or industrial development; trade or social programs; industrial growth or environmental protection; and the list is endless.

In this paper I propose to sketch a brief outline of some of the major social science concepts that impact on a study of teacher education in a developing country, or throughout the developing world. My purpose is to show that education, and specifically teacher education, is a primary social force woven throughout a study of national development and all its processes. This will not be a revelation to professional people or thoughtful citizens. What might be new are the systematic ways in which certain methodological features interact in that process of development and both cause and result from each other in patterns that might be predictable.

Think for a minute about any of the standard and traditional variables we use for studying education, and try and project what would be helpful information to a Ministry of Education in Africa, South America or Asia: sex, religion, age, parentage, ethnic distinction, etc. The social science

concepts in the mind of a western educational researcher will rarely match the reality in any given country.

There are two principal methodological departures upon which to base a system of inquiry about teacher education. Those are chiefly levels of philosophical abstraction: generalizing from selected evidence to patterns of national development, and generalizing to similar situations and conditions in other countries.

The tendency to generalize is always strong in the researcher. But it is the disciplined inquirer who must resist the attempt to stray from the supporting evidence and data.

Perhaps the most intellectually satisfying methodology for researching teacher education in the developing world is also the most sensible--a combination of a variety of social science methods. These include case studies, descriptions, analyses, comparisons, and emerging theories. A basic inquiry approach, such as that conducted by the Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal, provides solid methodological ground for comprehensive analysis.

This kind of approach is, paradoxically, global in scope, and requires a more multi-dimensional framework. It combines a study of how education influences, and in turn is influenced, by other developmental forces and events within a national, regional or other unifying network, such as religion, or tribal identity.

In this broad framework of social science and educational research, investigators should not plan to see their efforts blessed with early success. Western researchers especially have to be aware of when to cleanse their minds of pre-conceived rationales and concepts, particularly

of course if the data invalidate them. They must frequently discard out-moded theories, and state problems in a realistic way, which may not be the most reasonable and researchable way.

What I am suggesting is that theories of what or how to study problems of teacher education the developing world are themselves developmental, and thus could be the object of study within an American context. We are all aware of how quickly social science theories often quickly turn to myth with the explosive changes in world affairs. For example, what do we do with all those recent case studies of Iranian education? How relevant are current studies of history for prospective teachers in Argentina, and who could have predicted its war with England? What real effect does the liberal arts educational program have on training teachers in Afghanistan today?

These examples seemingly point to political changes. But in fact, the political changes occurred because of poorly analyzed social changes.

I believe that there are at least three major factors that govern an understanding of how teacher education relates to national progress: 1) economic realities; 2) political realities; and 3) social realities. I say "realities" to distinguish actual events and figures from the social science discipline itself.

2. Economic Realities in Teacher Education in the Developing World

It will come as no surprise that population increases weigh heavily in the determination of schooling and the production of teachers. The world's population is expected to be 8 billion by 2010, double what it was in 1975. This numerical increase brings about a proportionate rise in the number of dependents and school-aged children. Whether or not a

country decides that all dependents will actually go to school (and thus provide teachers for them) is arguable. The crippling imbalance in sheer numbers of people and access to material resources is already making an impact, and is often resulting in a marked decline in quality on schooling. The increase in the demand for workers has already led in India to greater reliance on child labor, at least in the agricultural sector. Of course high birth rates also tend to cancel out other gains, such as increase in the quality of life, higher productivity gains, and place a greater burden on subsistence in relation to income.

A nation may have ambitions to maintain high quality in the programs for preparing teachers, but throughout the developing world is also faced with the practical realities of a school-aged population which outstrips the teacher education resources.

An example from the world's largest nation has shed some light on the relationship of population, as only one variable from the world of economic realities.

From available estimates, it is safe to assume that there is a severe shortage of secondary school teachers in the People's Republic of China. This situation has been described in reports from the Ministry of Education from 1956 onwards. But it is deducible from the closing of all institutions during the so-called Cultural Revolution from 1966 to the mid-1970's, and from the slow development of previous academic standards.

Mark Sidel now reports, however, that the examination model for gaining entrance to the University has returned, as one encouraging sign of the reinstatement of academic rather than political criteria for collegiate admission.

Even if the government of the PRC wanted expanded secondary school programs, it will take years before it can provide qualified teachers to staff them. Drawing personnel from other sectors, manufacturing technicians for example, to teach in secondary schools, will only in the long run increase demand in those sectors from which such personnel were borrowed.

2. Politics and Teacher Development

However, all educational programs are vulnerable to national political decisions. It follows then that the education and training of teachers is also dependent upon the type of schools proposed.

One of the major issues now debated is: should schools be directly involved with the world of work and rural community development, rather than, say, as agents of literacy or numeracy. Or should the schools serve as agents for upward social mobility? We acknowledge that schools, by themselves, cannot be the sole agency responsible for improving the life of a community. Also needed are land reform measures, water control projects (such as drinking water, irrigation canals, etc.), health care and clinics, rural cooperatives, and a host of other projects. But one thing is clear; that the preparation and training (and retraining) of teachers is contingent upon the kinds of schools the government plans.

If we are addressing a rural community development school teacher, for example, we are considering a completely different kind of teacher from one commonly prepared in the developed world. We are in fact speaking of preparing teachers who are trained in practical work-related programs in the schools, programs which are essential to the development of local, community institutions: health, nutrition, agriculture and crafts, for example.

"The idea that ordinary rural primary school teachers could play an important role as...leaders in rural development activities...has been taken seriously by many governments and aid agencies concerned with education in developing countries," writes Jon Lauglo. He finds in an historical analysis, however, little to support the ambitious concept that teachers double up as extension agents or model farmers while also maintaining proficiency in their conventional school teaching.

The question Lauglo poses is whether or not teachers should concentrate on their traditional role of transmitting schooling knowledge in the usual school subjects, or whether they should widen that traditional understanding of a teacher also to include specific development needs, particularly in agriculture and crafts.

In Jamaica, Jennings-Wray reports that a successful agricultural education school was in existence 40 years but was closed because of political constraints. He points out that education is always vulnerable in the hands of politicians, and makes the telling observation that education in agriculture is simply not viewed by parents as a higher status education or occupation.

"In spite of all the rhetoric about the value of agricultural education, programmes for the development of the economics of the Third World countries, the reality is that the students and their parents do not see agriculture as a subject to be studied by anyone with ambition."

What inhibits the development of such programs in developing countries is precisely what hinders them in developed countries--the negative attitudes society has of practically oriented curricula.

3. Social Realities and Teacher Education in the Developing World

As I have noted, it is hard to escape the conclusion that in the developing world, education is not necessarily as highly prized a social

good as it is in industrialized countries, and that the value one places on, say, literacy is a more important good than that which an individual places on, say, religion or subsistence.

Social class values and attitudes and the social differences between the educated and the illiterate are also determinants.

There are obviously still efforts by the upper and middle classes in some countries to keep members of the lower classes illiterate and in menial and servile roles. Whether or not the children of the lower classes receive any education at all is still politically sensitive in many parts of the world. The difference between urban and rural schools in this context is often used as a convenient tool for analysis, but is not very reliable for assessing the depth of social class differences.

Still another feature is religious differences. Where there are sizeable minorities within national borders, or a large enough percentage of the total national population with many different kinds of minorities, the educational program may closely parallel religious instruction if that is permitted. This is not just true in places like Africa, Asia and elsewhere in the developing world. It is also true in places like the United States, where local school control and regionally dominant religious groups often dictate policy.

It may be one of the ironies of formal education, as spread throughout the world by colonial systems, that the process of formal schooling did in fact help weaken the informal apprenticeship programs that many countries now seek to rediscover in rural community education programs.

But apart from the economic and political realities, does schooling as a social reality make any difference at all? Even if we concede that schooling and preparing teachers will be of greater benefit for the nation that just preparing machinists for the factories, do teacher effects make a positive contribution to student achievement?

4. Teacher Effects on Students' Academic Achievement

Do school characteristics and teacher quality make a positive contribution to student achievement? Social science researchers have argued successfully that the inequalities in schooling are the result, not of schooling practices in themselves, but the result of societal inequalities. The research of Coleman, Jencks in the United States, Bowles and Gintis in England, and now Saha in Australia have pointed out that schooling differences lie chiefly in the fundamental character of society. Bowles and Gintis, for example, have argued that the major determinant of schooling achievement is in the structure of property in economic life, and that schools and teachers operate to reinforce these differences.

The policy implications for education in the developing world becomes: if teachers and schools don't result in improving schooling performance, what does? Stated economically, is a national investment in the training of teachers the most efficient allocation of scarce resources?

Saha, however, has concluded that, unlike conditions in the developed world, that trained teachers do make a difference in the developing world especially for more difficult subjects and at more advanced grades. Avalos and Haddad report similar findings from their reviews of teacher effectiveness in Africa, India, Latin America, the Middle

East, Malaysia, The Philippines and Thailand. Saha notes that "resistance to schooling represents a reassertion of traditional values and attitudes in the face of the non-traditional and, in this example, Western cultural and institutional penetration."

The point here is that in many less developed countries there are already low home background effects, and high teacher effects... the reverse of the condition in developed nations. However, the danger is that increasing the quality of teachers may have the same effect as replacing traditional values.

Conclusion

The gathering of data on teachers in developing countries is in itself a cultural activity. Of course, an investigator will find what he or she wants to find, and will in most instances amass evidence in support of a hypothesis suggested by government policy.

How much does teacher education contribute to a nation's development? How much, or how little proportionate to other services, should a developing country spend on teacher education at each stage in its development policy? Legislated policies and the administration of government education programs still rely largely on rules of thumb, intuition, luck, guesses, faith, and other non-quantifiable and unscientific methods. Everyone believes that education is a social good and that governments should deliver more of it.

A final resolution for studying teacher education concerns in the developing world demands something of an overall global set of strategies from the combined social sciences, and a probable balance in methodology from each. Conventional academic boundaries are not always appropriate, and the quest for a new methodological framework will continue to confront the active consciousness of researchers.

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